04/22/24 BIG TECH

# The Next U.S. President Will Have Troubling New Surveillance Powers + More

*The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.*

By The Defender Staff

4

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## The Next U.S. President Will Have Troubling New Surveillance Powers

**WIRED reported**:

> The ability of the United States to intercept and store text messages, calls, and emails of Americans in pursuit of foreign intelligence was not only extended but enhanced over the weekend in ways likely to remain enigmatic to the public for years to come.
>
> On Saturday, U.S. President Joe Biden signed a controversial bill extending the life of a warrantless U.S. surveillance program for two years, bringing an end to a months-long fight in Congress over an authority U.S. intelligence agencies acknowledge has been widely abused in the past.
>
> At the urging of the agencies and with the help of powerful bipartisan allies on Capitol Hill, the program has also now been extended to cover a wide

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range of new businesses, including U.S. data centers, according to a recent analysis by legal experts and civil liberties organizations that were vocally opposed to its passage.

Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, allows the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), among others, to eavesdrop on calls, texts, and emails traveling through U.S. networks, so long as one side of the communication is foreign.

Americans caught up in the program face diminished privacy rights.

## Did TikTok Videos Inspire a Teen's Suicide? His Mom Says She Found Graphic Evidence

**NBC News reported**:

It had been four months since Jennie DeSerio's son died by suicide. Wracked by grief and wondering what she didn't know, she picked up his phone and decided to go through his TikTok account.

What she found horrified her. Shortly before he died, she found that her 16-year-old, Mason Edens, had liked dozens of graphic videos about breakups, depression and suicide. She knew Mason had recently been through a bad breakup — she didn't know what he was watching on a platform that he was increasingly engrossed with.

DeSerio said she found at least 15 videos Mason liked that directly promoted suicide, some of which are still on the platform more than a year later. At least five specifically promoted the method he had used. NBC News reviewed the videos and found that some had accrued tens of thousands of likes. TikTok uses likes as a signal for its "For You" page algorithm, which serves users videos that are supposed to resonate with their interests.

She's now part of a lawsuit with eight other parents against several social media companies over what they say are product defects that led to their children's deaths. The lawsuit alleges that TikTok targeted Mason with videos that promoted suicide and self-harm. Their suit is one of a group of lawsuits pursuing a novel legal strategy that argues that social media platforms like TikTok are defective and dangerous because they are addictive for young people. Advocates hope that can be a way for people to get justice for harms allegedly caused by social media.

## Orwellian Sydney Police: We Will Be the 'Source of Truth'

**Reclaim the Net reported**:

Offering a fresh perspective on the fallout of a recent Sydney stabbing attack, residents have expressed their anger and mistrust toward the police who have insisted they alone should be the arbiter of truth in this incident. These sentiments stem from a press briefing given by New South Wales Police Commissioner Karen Webb last Thursday.

Webb, who was sharing information about a 16-year-old male being accused of terrorism following the stabbing of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel of Christ The Good Shepherd Church, asserted that the police will be the utterly reliable source of updates. She warned against "misinformation," but decided not to elaborate on what she was alluding to.

This attempt by the Australian police to monopolize control over the narrative of the incident has raised concerns among the online community about censorship, especially as the government has been pressuring online platforms to censor in recent days. The government has even gone as far


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as telling people to report their fellow citizens' speech to the country's chief censor.

## TikTok Says U.S. House Bill That Could Ban App Would 'Trample' Free Speech

**Reuters reported**:

> TikTok on Sunday repeated its free-speech concerns about a bill passed by the House of Representatives that would ban the popular social media app in the U.S. if Chinese owner ByteDance did not sell its stake within a year.
>
> The House passed the legislation on Saturday by a margin of 360 to 58. It now moves to the Senate where it could be taken up for a vote in the coming days. President Joe Biden has previously said he would sign the legislation on TikTok.
>
> TikTok in February had criticized the original bill that ultimately stalled in the Senate, saying that it would "censor millions of Americans." It had similarly argued that a state ban on TikTok in Montana passed last year was a violation of the First Amendment.
>
> The legislation passed on Saturday gives a nine-month deadline that could be extended by three months if the president were to determine progress toward a sale.

## EU to Investigate 'Addictive' TikTok Reward Feature

**The Hill reported**:

> The European Commission is investigating TikTok over a feature that launched in France and Spain that offers users the ability to earn points for completing certain tasks on the app, the commission said Monday.
>
> The investigation will look into whether TikTok's "addictive" features of its "TikTok lite" program violated the European Union's Digital Service Act (DSA) regulations, which include protections for minors online, the commission announced.
>
> The investigation will focus on TikTok's compliance with the regulations — which went into effect in February — through its "Task and Reward Lite" program, and the measures the company has taken to mitigate risks the program poses around the impact on minors' mental health.

## Medical Providers Still Grappling With UnitedHealth Cyberattack: 'More Devastating Than COVID'

**KFF Health News reported**:

> Two months after a cyberattack on a UnitedHealth Group subsidiary halted payments to some doctors, medical providers say they're still grappling with the fallout, even though UnitedHealth told shareholders on Tuesday that business is largely back to normal.
>
> "We are still desperately struggling," said Emily Benson, a therapist in Edina, Minnesota, who runs her own practice, Beginnings & Beyond. "This was way more devastating than COVID ever was."
>
> Change Healthcare, a business unit of the Minnesota-based insurance giant UnitedHealth Group controls a digital network so vast it processes nearly 1 in 3 U.S. patient records each year. The network is a critical conduit for shuttling information between most of the nation's insurance companies and medical providers, who submit claims through it to get paid for treating patients.

The company reported that the hacking has already cost it $870 million and that leaders expect the final tally to total at least $1 billion this year. To put that in perspective, the company reported $99.8 billion in revenue for the first quarter of 2024, an 8.6% increase over that period last year.

## New Report Reveals Faulty Data, Fallout From COVID Lockdowns in the Hoosier State

**The Daily Wire reported**:

Known for many memorable aphorisms, Winston Churchill once expressed a determination to "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Over the ensuing decades, some leaders have used such logic to justify taking advantage of people's fears during perilous times — trampling their liberties in ways the people would never tolerate during more normal circumstances.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the architect of much of the federal government's initial COVID-19 response, admitted late last year that many directives — such as 6-foot social distancing — "sort of just appeared" without any serious science backing them up. So seems to be the case with many mandates and orders imposed in the individual states.

On March 6, 2020, Governor Eric Holcomb declared a public health emergency. Over the course of more than two years, various government officials issued and enforced COVID-19 mandates, including stay-at-home orders, capacity limits, vaccine mandates, mask requirements, and business, school, and church closures.

Unfortunately, few of the leaders responsible for these harsh measures have undertaken any serious effort in the aftermath of their actions to assess whether they responded appropriately to the threats we faced.

## Japanese Doctors Demand Damages From Google Over 'Groundless' Reviews

**Associated Press reported**:

A group of Japanese doctors has filed a civil lawsuit against U.S. search giant Google, demanding damages for what they claim are unpoliced derogatory and often false comments. The lawsuit, filed Thursday in Tokyo District Court, demands 1.4 million yen ($9,400) in damages for 63 medical professionals.

Google said in an emailed statement Friday that it is working "24 hours a day" to reduce misleading or false information on its platform, combining human and technological resources "to delete fraudulent reviews." The lawsuit claims groundless negative reviews have been posted on Google Maps, a very popular app in Japan, that allows people to write ratings of various institutions and their personal reviews.

It said Google has done very little to fix the problem, despite complaints. "The damage suffered is substantial, and the people have been powerless to fight back. We don't agree that the platform shares no responsibility," Yuichi Nakazawa, who leads the legal team for the plaintiffs, told reporters.

Earlier this month, Google agreed to purge billions of records containing personal information collected from more than 136 million people in the U.S. who had surfed the internet through its Chrome web browser. That was part of a settlement in a U.S. lawsuit that had accused Google of illegal surveillance.

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**Jennifo**
a day ago

Ohhh you mean it's ok for this administration to have sweeping surveillance powers but not if Trump gets back in?? Ahhhh. I get it. These 'powers' have been there since Obama. Give me a break.

I prefer reading unslanted articles from CHD. Hope this isn't going in the wrong direction.

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**John Stone** Mod → Jennifo
a day ago

Hi Jennifo

We're quoting a Reuter's report. This isn't a CHD position.

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**Jennifo** → John Stone
12 hours ago

Oh good. Thank you.

0 0 Reply

**Rob DF**
2 days ago

"The Next U.S. President Will Have Troubling New Surveillance Powers..". Pretty funny headline. Almost everyone has an Android Phone or IPhone and let's add Alexa to the mix. Those devices are monitoring you ALL the time (and most people LOVE IT!). Pray tell what more "Troubling New Surveillance Powers" anyone could wish for?

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